



SPADES AND CLUBS



U.S. NAVAL MOBILE CONSTRUCTION BATTALION 25

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Troops Gather to Mourn the Loss of BU1 (SCW) Jerry A. Tharp



BU1 (SCW) Jerry Tharp

AL ASAD, Iraq (July 17, 2006) – Hundreds of soldiers, Marines and Sailors gathered at a memorial service to mourn the loss and reflect upon the life of BU1 (SCW) Jerry Tharp, 44, of Aledo Ill., who died when an improvised explosive device detonated at a Seabee project site. Tharp was helping to rebuild the infrastructure of Iraq by repairing roads in the Al Anbar province. EN1 Troy Devault was seriously injured from the same explosion. Both Seabees are with Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 25, 9th Naval Construction Regiment.

Attending the service were Marines of the 9th Engineer Support Battalion, Okinawa, Japan.

These Marines work closely with the Seabees to provide security at work sites and during convoy operations. Many of the Marines present at the memorial were also at the site when the incident occurred. These Marines and Seabees stood side by side to honor Tharp during the service.

Those in attendance also included CAPT Terry Wilkerson, Commander 9th Naval Construction Regiment, CAPT Robert Newman, Commander 3rd Naval Construction Regiment, MAJ Vernon Veggeberg, 9th Engineer Support Battalion (Fwd), 1st Marine Logistics Group (Fwd), and CDR David Marasco, Commanding Officer of NMCB 25. Rear Admiral Phillips, 1st Naval Construction Division, was unable to attend the service, but he shared his thoughts and concerns with a letter that Marasco read during the memorial.

“With the heaviest of heart, I want you and your Seabees to know that all of us throughout the Naval Construction Force feel the loss that you, your troops, and your family have experienced once again with the loss of BU1 Tharp,” said Marasco as he read Rear Admiral Phillip’s letter. “While the battalion has had little time to grieve the loss of EO1 Rovinski and HM2 Jaenke, all of these tragic deaths only strengthen our commitment to win the war on terror, reinforcing the fact that regardless of where we serve, we are one Seabee family.”

Marasco reminisced about time he spent with Tharp in the United States and in Iraq. He spoke passionately about Tharp’s natural ability to readily improve mission effectiveness and morale among his fellow Seabees. “His eagerness to just get

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Seabees mourn the loss of BU1 (SCW) Jerry Tharp who was killed in action in Iraq earlier this month.



CDR David Marasco
CEC, USN

Commanding Officer

Family and Friends of NMCB 25; today it's August 1st and this morning I spent some time reflecting on the events of the last couple of months; certainly this period of time has been challenging for us all as we suffered the very unfortunate loss of three of our finest.

All of our losses have saddened me deeply thus illuminating the harsh reality that to be effective in this war on terror we must be out there, and in being out there we are not immune to the cost of Freedom. Your loved ones have responded courageously in the face of our tribulations and have continued to move forward and achieve such amazing accomplishments in support of our collective efforts to secure a free Iraqi Nation. I am extremely honored, proud, and humbled by the performance, drive, and sheer dedication to duty that your loved ones (Our Seabees) have demonstrated in the toughest of times.

Over the last couple of weeks Master Chief Benzinger and I have been quite literally traveling the Iraqi countryside; getting out there to visit our fine Seabees who have been making the difference on a multitude of projects. To date we have managed to visit every place that we have Seabees working, including our Seabees attached to Task Force Sierra. Each and every time I am amazed at the work I see accomplished and am truly proud of their tremendous performance.

In a short few weeks we will begin our journey home and you will be reunited with your courageous loved ones. About a month ago I sent a note to our Ombudsmen highlighting the events of our journey home and I want to share that with you too.

Over the last month we have been developing our plans for our trip home. We expect the details of the plan to be made available in the next week or two. The details that we will provide will be only specific enough as not to violate any security issues.

Similar to when we deployed, we will be coming home in three waves: an Advance Party (AP) (which will be small), Main body (MB), and Delay Party (DP). I will address the Task Force Sierra personnel at the end of this letter.

The dates we will start Retrograding will begin around the 2nd week of September with the last group heading

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BACKGROUND PHOTO: Fine sand covers a new fuel farm in the Al Anbar Province.

BACK COVER: HT3 David Clendening welds a new brace onto a concrete mixer. Road conditions require welders and construction mechanics to conduct extra maintenance and repair on equipment.

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Story submissions are encouraged from each detachment and Specialty Unit, but there is no guarantee each will be represented in every newsletter.

Your comments, correspondence, and questions, may be addressed to NMCB 25 Public Affairs, NMCB 25 Main Body, FPO AP 96601-5113.

out of here around week four (There are five weeks in Sept). The details we will release will include what wave the members will be on (AP, MB, or DP) and a three-day window for each wave's arrival time in Port Hueneme. We will say something like this: If you are on the AP expect to arrive in Port Hueneme around X dates (three day window). This will allow families to plan ahead and give them the opportunity to meet us in Port Hueneme if they desire upon our return.

We are not flying as a group into the Midwest. The scenario will be like this: Once the respective waves arrive in Port Hueneme, the member will be given the option to take a 96 hour liberty beginning immediately. At the end of the liberty period, members will begin the demobilization process, which can take 3-5 days. Once they are demobilized they will be given tickets home. A member can choose not to take the 96-hour liberty and go straight to demobilization if they desire, but that is up to them and it is incumbent upon the families to work that issue out directly with their deployed spouse. Taking into consideration the 96 hour liberty period and demobilization process families can expect their loved ones to be HOME, HOME anywhere between the last week of September and the second week of October.

For the families of our Task Force Sierra personnel: information regarding their return will not be available until most likely late August. The target timeframe for their arrival in PH is about the third week of October, but again keep in mind they will have an AP, MB, and DP like us and the timeframes will vary. We will keep you informed on updates as they become available. Both Master Chief Benzinger and I, and other key staff will remain on active duty until all of our Seabees are home.

I hope this issue of our Family Gram finds you all in good health and spirits and we look forward to seeing you all very soon. Thank you.

Executive Officer

We have started our "reverse" planning process for our trip back to the U. S. There are a lot of "hoops to jump", "I's to dot, and T's to cross". Our Operations staff is orchestrating the entire process and making sure all the appropriate "buttons are pushed". The Embark staff is coordinating our transportation from here to Kuwait first and then back to the States. Supply department is working on getting all our gear shipped back home, and will handle the turn-in process of all the extra equipment we brought with us. Admin is making sure all the awards and evaluations are completed, and pay is correct. And our Training staff is making plans for future training.

Chaps and Doc Matson are working hard to assure our transition training period in Kuwait is outstanding. Both Doctor Kaufman and Chaplain Wolrabe from 1NCD will also be on hand to assist.

All this is done to minimize the glitches that may come about as we transition back to being Citizen Sailors once again. As we have learned many times good planning today will reduce some of the stress in the future. And a good Coming Home plan will also reduce the stress of going home, thereby making it that much more enjoyable for us all.

Thanks to all of you who have given our Seabees the outstanding support they deserve.



LCDR Thomas Logan
CEC, USN

Command Master Chief

As the days of summer become shorter so do the days of our deployment, and I start to think about not only going back to just two days a month, two weeks a year as reservist but also about returning to my civilian career. How will I fit into the normal day to day routine that I had before I left? We must soon put a way of life that we were accustomed to living for the last nine months aside and go back to our previous life styles. We must be vigilant to the fact that there is life after deployment and that there are changes that occurred while we were gone that may be hard to adapt to. One thing it brings to mind is how I will appreciate the simple things in life that I took for granted.

Our families, friends, and employers also made unselfish sacrifices in support of our mission. I thank you all for your generous support of all of us here at NMCB 25. We are staying focused on our mission here as we also look forward to our lives after we return home.



Brian Benzinger
CMDM (SCW)

Command Chaplain



LCDR Peter Muschinske
CEC, USN

“We are a nation of communities... a brilliant diversity spread like stars, like a thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky.”
George W. Bush (born 06 JUL 1946)

In the midst of keeping our focus on the mission at hand we have all glimpsed the brightening light of reuniting those communities of various sorts: Family and friends, work place and community organizations, congregations and neighborhoods, towns and suburbs. One thing we all need to keep in mind is the fact that both individuals and communities have undergone changes. Families and extended families have experienced births and graduations, declines in health and deaths along with other less obvious changes. With Jerry Tharp's death, we are reminded of just how difficult some of these changes are. As stars, we have shined brightly in various ways but we have been on the move—“shooting stars—and our place of reunion will be different from our place of departure back in January. Our Ombudsmen are working very hard to organize gatherings with ideas, subject matter experts and resources for your reunion planning. Please, families, make every effort to participate in these gathering/family days. You are sure to be inspired to consider important matters about our benefits and pointers to make our reunion and reintegration as great as possible. If you need to be connected to your ombudsman, contact the Command Ombudsman, Jackie Smith, so you can be linked with the appropriate person. Her e-mail address is jj33700@hotmail.com or reach her by phone at (262) 716-6291.

July is also the “All Star Break” for you baseball fans out there. It is a time of honoring the contributions of key players and a chance for each team to assess where they stand at the mid-season mark. You are, in fact, “All Stars” who have overcome many challenges during the time we've been in South West Asia and even before we left home. During the mid-season review it's fine for us to be making lists of our hopes and dreams for reunion. As the summer winds down, Seabees and family members can do some cross referencing to see which goals will be attainable, which are clearly unrealistic and what new conclusions can be reached together. But after the “All Star Break” all teams need to get back out and finish the rest of the season, one day at a time. God is granting us strength and stamina, day by day. Peace and hope to you, with our prayers and care.



Troops gather to mourn the loss of BU1 (SCW) Jerry A. Tharp, continued from page 1

out there and perform, mentor junior troops, his positive attitude, and his professionalism, added tremendous synergy to our battalion,” said Marasco.

Tharp and the other Seabees of NMCB 25 have been supporting reconstruction efforts in Iraq since March. They have repaired bridges and runways, drilled water wells, constructed a medical facility, and supported convoy operations. These operations and others like them would not be possible without the primary convoy routes being repaired continuously. It is Tharp’s devotion to duty on the road repair crew and other Seabee construction projects

Members of the 3rd Marine Air Wing band play “America the Beautiful” during BU1 (SCW) Jerry Tharp’s memorial service.

that many will remember him for most.

“Saddened deeply by our loss, I can tell you with the utmost conviction, that his death is not in vain, and that his efforts and the collective efforts of his entire team are making a difference,” said Marasco. “There are over 185 locations where we have made it safer for our Sailors, Marines, and soldiers who travel our lines of communication.”

Seabees continue their work despite daily challenges and tragic losses. Tharp eagerly embraced the daily challenges of working on construction projects under difficult and dangerous situations. Many felt that he would have been proud of his crew and how they handled events following his death.

“The real story to be told...one of honor and courage humbles me,” said Marasco. “And that’s the story of Jerry’s team, whom on the heels of his loss, continued on with their mission, repairing the very crater created from the explosion that took his life. Not only is this the most heroic tribute to Jerry, it is a dagger in the eye of the insurgency, delivering the clear message - that you will not break our resolve.”

The loss of Builder 1st Class Jerry Tharp, following the deaths of Equipment Operator 1st Class Gary Rovinski and Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Jaime Jaenke has been difficult for the battalion, but CDR Marasco may have summed up the collective feelings of the battalion in his closing remarks at the memorial. “Builder 1st Class Jerry Tharp, I was proud to have you in my command,” said Marasco. “You will be missed my friend, and your memory will continue in us all. Goodbye my friend, and I bid you farewell.”



Battalion members pay their final respects during the memorial postlude. CAPT Terry Wilkerson, Commander 9th Naval Construction Regiment, and other key staff members traveled to Al Asad to attend the service and support the battalion.

Junior Sailor of the Quarter and Sailor of the Quarter FY06 announced

Editor's note: The following are excerpts from the award letters.



**EA1 (SCW/FMF)
Michael McCarty**

Sailor of the Quarter, 1st Quarter FY06

"Petty Officer McCarty displayed outstanding initiative as the Operations Department Leading Petty Officer. He supervised and mentored Operations Personnel in the proper planning and tracking of battalion projects at Ft. McCoy Wis. As leader of the Engineering Survey team he provided technical expertise to provide horizontal control for base mapping project at Ft. McCoy, Wisconsin, saving the base over \$10,000. As Battalion Command Fitness Leader, he implemented procedures to monitor the Physical Fitness Assessment for over 550 battalion personnel. He donated countless hours of his personal time to compile and report the Battalions PFA status. His hard work and dedication resulted in raising the Battalions PFA status to 95%."



SK1 Michelle Reiling

Sailor of the Quarter, 2nd Quarter FY06

"During mobilization at in Port Hueneme, CA, "Petty Officer Reiling developed, implemented and managed a billeting matrix that included offsite and on base berthing at seven different locations for 500 battalion personnel resulting in zero discrepancies. This was instrumental to the oval morale of the battalion during the six-week process of mobilization and readiness training. She was subsequently awarded a Navy Achievement Medal for her efforts. As a vital member of the Supply Department Advanced party to Al Asad, Iraq she was a quick study displaying incredible talent in all facets of the turnover process. Utilizing her leadership skills and training abilities she mentored he subordinates resulting in an incredibly smooth and successful transition period."



**UT1 (SCW)
Daniel Fitzpatrick**

Sailor of the Quarter, 3rd Quarter FY06

"Petty Officer Fitzpatrick established and implemented a preventative maintenance program for over 200 air conditioning units, leading a team of four in the performance of this critical maintenance. His shop performed over 125 trouble calls, maintained the split system air conditioning units and repaired an additional 27 split system units. His leadership and technical know-how were critical when the camp's sewage lift station failed and expedient repairs had to be made. Petty Officer Fitzpatrick worked tirelessly through the night and into the next, ensuring that the sanitary system was functional until replacement parts were obtained to repair the lift station properly. Additionally, he led several working parties in assisting the Logistics Cell with the inventory of 54 large containers requiring the cataloging of over 10,000 line items."



BU3 John Bolinger

Junior Sailor of the Quarter, 1st Quarter FY06

"Petty Officer Bolinger displayed exceptional leadership and professionalism over and above his rank in the performance of his duties as the Detachment Career Counselor, Squad Leader and as an Acting Platoon Commander. As Career Counselor, he counseled new affiliates to the detachment, made arrangements for personnel approaching their end of service obligation, prepared members for rate conversions and arranged for reenlistment bonuses. As Squad Leader, he scheduled and supervised the monthly drill activities, performed mid-term evaluation counseling and ensured accountability of his squad. When the mobilization order was issued, he became an Acting Platoon Commander responsible for the mobilization notification of his platoon, created an outstanding rapport with his Reserve Center enabling his shipmates to make a smooth transition to active duty."



SK3 Setina Cox

Junior Sailor of the Quarter, 2nd Quarter FY06

"While at Naval Base Ventura County Petty Officer Cox was a valuable part of the supply team, assisting with Central Store Room issues, billeting organization and uniform issues. She completed the micro-Snap school along with all mobilization requirements prior to deploying out of conus. Recognizing her abilities, she was quickly assigned as TOA (Table of Allowance) Manager when mobilized to Al Asad, Iraq. Confronted with the challenge she meticulously reorganized, maintained and corrected numerous discrepancies of kits and assembly units valued at \$4.2 million. She is directly responsible to timely reports to her superiors including Non CESE TOA validity, TOA SORTS and random inventory sampling. Along with supporting numerous local projects she also augments three remote detachment sites with NCF Kits vital to battalion mission projects."



**CMCN (SCW)
Olney Gober**

Junior Sailor of the Quarter, 3rd Quarter FY06

"Constructionmen Gober's abilities have assured success in every assignment ever asked of him, no matter what the tasking. He stays with a job until it is completed, regardless of the time of day or night. During the past three months he worked over 70 off-duty hours without being asked to do so. He has accepted enthusiastically any responsibility assigned, and has held jobs as tool room petty officer during turn over and had 100% accountability, assigned assistant tire shop supervisor and oversaw over 100 tire replacements and repairs without one come-back, now holds crew leader position doing critical CESE repair. Was assigned as Admirals escort on Admiral Phillips visit to Camp Al Asad. Received high praise from Admiral Phillips on his conduct, military bearing and outstanding Seabee esprit de corps."

NMCB 25 Detachment Al Taqaddum Members Honored to have Rear Admiral Phillips at Seabee Combat Warfare Ceremony.

The first two members of the Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 25, Al Taqaddum Detachment, to complete the Seabee Combat Warfare program were ceremoniously pinned by Rear Admiral Phillips of the 1st Naval Construction Division on August 9th, 2006. EA1 Dale Lester and GM2 Timothy Tuttle were honored to have Admiral Phillips at Al Taqaddum, Iraq, to participate in the ceremony. Other honorary guests who were in attendance at the ceremony included: Master Chief Major of the 1st Naval Construction Division, Commodore Wilkerson of the 9th Naval Construction Regiment, and Master Chief Blankenship of the 9th Naval Construction Regiment.



**PSC Judith Ratajczak, YN1 Rebecca Palomares
and PS2 Christina King**

Greeting from Papa Det, Port Hueneme, California

Hello, hello. Members of the Papa Det may seem a world away, but they are working very hard to support us each and every day back in California. Recently they sent their greetings and said they miss us and can't wait until we get home.

They want us to know that they are thinking of us daily and that we are all in their prayers.

Fallen hero's Life Reflected upon by Fellow Seabee



BU1 Jerry Tharp pauses before continuing work at a Seabee Compound in Iraq. Hundreds attended a memorial service for Tharp, which was held in Al Asad on July 17, 2006.

There are those select people in life that make you feel as if anything is possible. BU1 Jerry Tharp was that type of person. Work seemed like another form of recreation to him and he put everything he had into it. His positive attitude was contagious and he was born leader among junior petty officers in the battalion.

Tharp served three years as an artilleryman in the Army, but returned to the civilian sector to pursue a career in construction. Tharp, 44, lived in Aledo, Illinois where he worked full time as an operator on a concrete pump truck. He belonged to the Operating Engineer's Union Local 150 and earned the nickname "pumping Jerry" among his fellow workers.

His civilian skills in commercial equipment operation and concrete construction are typical of many of the Seabees who serve on the

Reserve side of the military for the Navy Seabees. The combination of civilian skills and military training are what made Tharp a Seabee and valued mentor.

Tharp loved being a member of a construction battalion and would tell people "he wouldn't want to be anything else but a 'Bee," said BU2 Jeffery Dale, Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 25, 9th Naval Construction Regiment, 1st Naval Construction Division. "And in his heart, Jerry found his true calling as a builder in the Navy Seabees."

"Jerry had a unique personality and if you got to spend any time with him you couldn't help but love the guy," said Dale. "He was always looking out for his Seabees and he took great joy in doing so."

Dale also said that Tharp often spoke about their road repair mission outside the wire and knew that he fully accepted the risks involved. "He knew that for every hole we filled, that was a life potentially saved, because that was one less hole afforded the enemy to plant their improvised explosive devices," said Dale. "I think that was the driving force that gave him peace while going out and risking his life day in and day out."

After the incident, the Seabees in NMCB-25 did what they knew had to be done, and what they thought Tharp would have wanted – to complete the mission. Staying on the very site where Tharp was killed and where EN1 Troy Devault was seriously wounded in the same explosion, they repaired the road so that other coalition forces would be safer in that area.

A memorial was held in Al Asad for Tharp on 17 July. Soldiers, Sailors and Marines all gathered to mourn and reflect upon the life of one Seabee. "We lost a teammate, we lost a friend, but most of all we lost a brother and a shipmate," said Dale. "Jerry would not want us to dwell on how he left this world. He would want us to celebrate how he lived while he was here. So let us be happy for the



BU1 Jerry Tharp directs a concrete pour at Al Asad during an early period in NMCB-25's deployment.



BU1 (SCW) Jerry Tharp (front, center) in a photo with other members of the road crew. The crew is helping to rebuild the infrastructure of Iraq. (back) EO1 (SCW) Jevon Thomas, EO2 James Huenink, EO2 Daniel Bondeson, EN1 Troy Devault, HM2 Jessica Johnson, EO1 (SCW) Douglas Miller, HMC (Sel) Kimberly LaFray, BU2 (CSW) Craig Witts, and BU1 (SCW) David Coleman. (front) EOC (Sel) Danny Hollenback, BU1 Brant Schueller, EO2 David Banister, EO2 Dennis Kowalczyk, EO1 (SCW) Jason Sumner, SN Brandon Madsen, BU1 Thomas Humphrey, BU1 (SCW) Jerry Tharp, BU2 Jeffery Dale, EO2 Harold Beville, BU1 (SCW) Michael Upman, and BU2 Robert Cassiani

memories he gave us, and let us always remember the man he was, and the man he wanted to be.”

Family was very important to Jerry. His sleeping area was filled with pictures of family members and he was always asking others to take pictures so that he would have something new to send to his wife.

Tharp was awarded several medals posthumously including the Purple Heart, Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with Combat “V”, and the Combat Action Ribbon. CAPT Terry Wilkerson, 9th Naval Construction Regiment and CDR David Marasco, Commanding Officer of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 25 attended the memorial in Al Asad.

Tharp is survived by his wife Gayle Ann, two stepdaughters, Carrie Hamm and Heather Pritchett, and four grandchildren.



Among other battalion projects, BU1 Jerry Tharp also worked long hours to help rebuild the countries infrastructure on a road repair crew in Western Iraq.





Seabees Complete Fuel Farm Operations

A Seabee uses a roller during the construction of a new fuel farm at Al Asad. Many NMCB-25 equipment operators run heavy equipment for commercial companies in the United States.

AL ASAD, Iraq – It's not a glamorous project. No dignitaries or bands will ever come to commemorate this achievement. But completion of the new fuel depot in the Al Anbar province this summer by Seabees of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 25, was a significant milestone and reason enough for many to celebrate.

While the work seemed quite distant from helping the Iraqi people directly, the depot will provide efficient fuel storage; fuel that makes it possible for troops to transport badly needed cargo, water, and food to coalition units throughout Al Anbar province.



EO1 (SCW) Jason Sumner and EO1 (SCW) William Spahr inspect a fuel berm during construction of a fuel farm at Al Asad.

Although far removed from the provincial cities, these heavy equipment operators know that their work will go a long way in helping to create a stable environment for the people of Iraq. "The fuel depot project is important because without it the greater mission couldn't go on," said Equipment Operator 1st Class (SCW) William Spahr, project supervisor at the site. "We couldn't run convoys, we couldn't do construction projects, we couldn't assist the Iraqi people with projects like water wells, bridge construction and road repairs."

The new fuel farm will allow consolidation of smaller, less efficient fuel storage points that needed to be replaced. The job was a lengthy process for the Seabees. For weeks, the crews staged before daylight, started working at dawn and continued the project long after dusk.

The Seabees graded an area the size of over 18 football fields at to create a parking area for fuel tankers and to accommodate a network of berms that will hold fuel bladders. In the event of a fuel leak, these berms will prevent fuel from contaminating adjacent areas. These bladders, which look something like giant hot water bottles, will fit squarely inside each berm.

To form the berms, Seabees create a procession of sand that flows from one piece of heavy equipment to another. It is a strange work site to visit. The incessant winds may carry most of the diesel exhaust away, but the heavy throb of diesel engines remains.

The Seabees said the project was challenging because of the environmental conditions, but they were quick to point out that the real work is being done by the troops patrolling the cities and streets of Iraq each day. "The guys that go outside the wire, you have to give credit to them," said Equipment Operator 2nd Class Donald Avila. "Our job here is a heavy task. We're close to the wire,



EO2 Jeffrey Vanhoven uses a track excavator to load a dump truck, operated by EO1 (SCW) Sarah Hendrickson, with sand during construction of berms at a new fuel farm at Al Asad.

but it's not as dangerous as those who operate outside the wire."

Avila's upbeat response is in sharp contrast to his appearance. He is covered with dust from head to toe after operating an end-loader in the desert environment. Sand clings to every crevice of his clothes and face. The fine crystal-white particles have collected; it almost looks as if winter frost has formed despite the scorching heat.

The size of sand particles varies quite a bit in Iraq. The sand at this project site has the consistency of talcum powder. If it is stirred up, it is easily blown about by the wind. The introduction of heavy equipment into this environment creates a blinding tapestry of sand and heavy metal in motion.

The movements of construction equipment are accented by a torrent of newly disturbed sand streaming away from the action. Equipment operators cross paths regularly, covering each other with waves of sand. One driver half-joked that he didn't understand how he could be working in an open desert environment, stretching thousands of miles in each direction, only to find another equipment operator constantly working only ten feet upwind of him.



A Seabee uses an end loader to build a new berm during construction of a fuel farm at Al Asad. NMCB-25 heavy equipment operators completed the project this summer.

feel of your vehicle. It's all hydraulics. Hydraulic fluid runs through the lines and creates pressure points. You can feel different stages of your lifting and pushing." Operators must know how their piece of equipment is going to react and compensate for changing situations before they actually happen.

"It's a good job," said Avila. "It's a long job. The days are hot. The afternoon crew catches the hottest part of the day and it runs right into the night. Last week it was over 120 degrees for over five days in a row. The winds blow about 20 to 40 mph everyday."

During the hottest period of the day, the wind loses its cooling effect and feels more like the air from a furnace. The sun bakes the equipment and it's hot to the touch. Operators wear gloves to protect their hands from the heat.

The wind swept desert is a mixed blessing. The open environment is beneficial during on-the-job training. "We've got a lot of guys who do this for a



EO2 Donald Avila waits during refueling operations. Equipment operators and their gear had to contend high winds and fine sand particles during construction of a new fuel farm.

"The dust and the wind make it very hard to see at times," said Spahr. "We've actually had to stop work about five times because the visibility drops to the point where you can't see your hand in front of your face."

The fine particles are more than just a hindrance to equipment operators. They wear heavily on the equipment Seabees depend upon. Crews must clean the air filters and grease the equipment daily. The bright white sand quickly fills the crevices of the engines and gear until they look as though they have been wind swept by snow.

"It takes getting use to," said Avila. It's a heck of a lot different than regular dirt. It's a fine, fine powder."

According to Avila, equipment operators learn to handle their work by feeling for changes in movement and pressure. "It's a lot of touch and feel," said Avila. "You learn to feel the thickness of the sand. You learn the



EO1 (SCW) Jason Sumner and EO2 Jeffrey Vanhoven discuss operations during construction of a new fuel farm.

living on the outside and we have some who had no experience at all,” said Spahr. “The people here are very motivated. They want to be here and they’re working very hard. The learning curve was very steep, but everybody is able to operate every piece of equipment out here to help get the project completed on time.”

“It’s a good crew,” said Avila. “At the beginning we were rough, but now we run like a symphony. Everybody knows where everybody is going and you learn to read each other’s movements.”

Seabees are glad this project is finished, reason indeed to celebrate. These heavy equipment operators will move on to other construction projects in Al Anbar province, while the work they completed at Al Asad will make life easier for soldiers, Marines, and Sailors who travel the roads of Iraq; and ultimately make life easier for the Iraqi people.

Seabee Rockhounds Continue Their Mission in Western Iraq



A Seabee uses an end loader to transfer material from a storage area at an MLO yard to a waiting gravel truck. Seabees have hauled over 600 loads of material to project site across Iraq.

Story contributed by CMC Bret Nystrom, SSG Harvey Bolling, and CPT Tim Roberts

Somewhere between the speed of the Greyhound and the loyalty of the Basset hound lies the little known “Rock Hound”. In January 2006, the Rockhound team was assigned the mission of hauling construction material throughout central and Western Iraq. Like Daniel Boone, they were to blaze a trail and set the standard. The team has been dedicated to accomplishing their mission each day in Iraq and has remained highly motivated despite unusual circumstances.

They say war creates strange bedfellows, and Operation Iraqi Freedom has kept this saying alive. The men and women of the 913th Engineer Company (913th EN CO), and the Navy Seabees of NMCB 133 and NMCB 22, originally teamed up at Camp Fallujah to deliver the much-needed materials across the area of operation.

The 913th EN CO (CSE)’s equipment consisted of five 20-ton dump trucks, one LMTV, one M916 tractor with M870 trailer, a 5-yard front-end loader, and a maintenance contact truck. The Seabees brought ten 20-ton tractors and 10 leased 32 cubic meter dump trailers. Eight members of NMCB 40, who replaced Seabees of NMCB 22 and NMCB 133, joined the ranks of NMCB 25 Seabees to continue the mission.

Since April, the Rock Hounds have delivered over 600 truckloads that carried over 10,000 cubic meters of sand, gravel, fill and rock to construction projects in the area.



EO1 Daniel Segretto, CM1 Kevin Brown, EO2 Dale Gillaspie, EO2 (AW) Daniel Collins, EO2 Jack Wege, EO2 Bradley Gayer, CM1 (SCW) Thomas Knapp, EO1 Andy Harms, (front) CMC (SCW) Bret Nystrom (Not pictured: CM2 Scott Kenworthy)

FHWA Engineers Meet in Iraq

By: LT David Platz, CEC, USN, and LT Pete Jilek, CEC, USN

FHWA Engineers Pete Jilek, Office of Program Administration, and Dave Platz, Wisconsin Division, met in Fallujah, Iraq in May. Both lieutenants are in the United States Navy Civil Engineer Corps and were recalled to active duty in January 2006 to support Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Both Pete and Dave went through mobilization training in Port Hueneme, Calif., at the same time and had several military classes together.

Graduates of the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Jilek graduated in 1998, while Platz graduated in 1999.

Jilek serves as one of the two construction officers in the Al Anbar province in Western Iraq. He is assigned to the headquarters unit of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF). Jilek oversees simple projects like upgrading rural roadways and bridges to more complex projects like reconstructing helicopter landing zones and Coalition Forces/Iraqi Army bases.

Platz serves as the Officer in Charge of a Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) Detachment in Iraq. Platz oversees the design, construction, and maintenance of vertical and horizontal projects.

The lieutenants belong to Commissioned Reserve Battalions and are maintaining the long legacy of the Seabees through their dedicated service. The Navy Civil Engineer Corps was first commissioned by Congressional Statute March 2, 1867.

From 1867 until 1942, civilian contractors provided all labor for Navy construction projects. This posed a problem at construction sites in hostile territory, since civilians were not permitted to bear arms without being perceived and treated as guerilla fighters. They were therefore unable to defend themselves and their projects.

Since 1942, Seabees have built and fought in every major conflict in which the United States participated. They were involved in major Pacific and Atlantic invasions during World War II, the Inchon landing during the Korean War, building an emergency airstrip in the Bay of Wonsan, Vietnam, Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, and Operation Enduring Freedom/Iraqi Freedom. Seabees have also been the Navy's most prominent goodwill ambassadors, rebuilding war-ravaged facilities and providing relief after natural disasters throughout the world including tsunami relief in 2004.



LT David Platz, CEC, USN, and LT Pete Jilek,



This magazine cover was made locally to celebrate the efforts of BU2 Chad Bartman and SW1 (SCW) Jesse Vanloo in the 5K run on July 4th, 2006 at Al Qaim, Iraq. Out of 40 runners, Bartman was the champion and Vanloo was runner up.



Photo taken by BU1 (SCW) Sam Norman's wife in Michigan. Sam's children, Noah and Eli, wanted to show support for their father and his unit.

A Departure from Active Duty for One, a Return to Active Duty for Another, and the Chance Meeting of Two Brothers in Iraq



BU2 Michael Ludwig, 39, NMCB-25, and brother Karl Ludwig, 28, meet in Western Iraq

Two brothers who hadn't seen each other in several years met under unusual circumstances in Iraq this summer. It is ironic that it took a military deployment by one and the acceptance of an overseas job by the other to create a situation where they could finally meet.

The brothers hadn't seen each other since Thanksgiving, 2004. At that time, Karl Ludwig, 28, was still working as an Information Technician in the Navy while his older brother, BU2 Michael Ludwig, 39, a Seabee with NMCB 25, was a partner in a construction company.

Over a decade earlier, Michael had also been on active duty with the Navy. When he was stationed on the USS Iwo Jima (LPH2), Michael would receive drawings from his little brother, Karl, who was ten years his junior. These pictures often depicted Navy ships. "He always looked up to me and is probably one of the reasons he joined the Navy in 1995," said Michael.

When Michael left the active duty Navy he decided to continue his military career with the Seabees, where he could use his construction skills to further serve his country.

The Navy has changed over time, and so have the Ludwig brothers. Younger brother Karl is now bigger than his older brother. Karl decided to leave the Navy to pursue a job with a firm that works closely with the military. As soon as he left active duty, Karl's new employer needed him to work in Iraq - a chance meeting for the two brothers was lost again..

When Michael received word that NMCB 25 would be mobilized, he hoped that there would be a chance the two could meet overseas. Iraq is a large country though. The odds of the two brothers actually finding each other were slim.

As fate would have it, Michael was assigned to a NMCB-25 Convoy Security Element (CSE) as a .50 cal gunner with the CSE's pace vehicle. When Michael's convoy stopped at a base where Karl was working, he made a surprise phone call. At the time, Karl only knew that Michael was somewhere in Iraq.

"I made a surprise phone call at 7 a.m. to touch base right away," said Michael. "He was very excited and asked, 'Where you at?' - I'm right here with you," said Michael Ludwig.

The two met and talked for over three hours.

"I hadn't seen him in so many years, so it was like a homecoming," said Michael. "My brother is a very good friend to me. I didn't realize it at the time, but it was very hard for Karl to see me leave home when he was little."

The brothers had enough time to catch up on old and current news, and then it was time for Michael to again return to the roads of Iraq. Karl has since moved on to other areas of Iraq. No doubt, when the two meet once again back in the U.S., they will have more than enough stories to share once again.





GM1 Chad Johnson assists YN2 Mary Francis as she raises a flag in honor of her father, Joseph Francis, who served as a paratrooper with the 101st airborne during WWII.

airborne during WWII,” said YN2 Mary Francis. “He was a humble man who didn’t talk too much about the war. He passed away in November of 2003. We were very, very close and I just put the flag (national ensign) up in his memory – in honor of him.”

YN2 Francis joined the Navy in 2001. Her father was proud that she enlisted, but was a little nervous that she might be deployed one day. For YN2 Francis, it’s important to remember what her father bestowed upon her, and raising the flag in his name is one way to honor his memory. “I put it up, like I’m here, and everything’s going to be ok,” said Francis. “He’s with me in spirit.”

EA1 (SCW/FMF) Michael McCarty also flew a flag in remembrance of his father, Neil McCarty, who was a veteran of the Army. McCarty flew the flag on the second anniversary of his father’s passing. He is going to send the flag to a high school in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin where his father was a statistician for the football team for over 10 years.

Members who supply an official flag can have it flown over certain detachment sites. The five-dollar donation directly supports the MWR fund. In exchange, each participant receives a certificate that shows the date the flag was flown over Iraq.

“I’m going to frame the original certificate, which is signed by the CO, and have the flag put into a casing and hang it in my living room,” said Francis.

Seabees Support MWR Flag Program

Seabees are participating in a flag-raising program that improves unit morale and benefits the battalion’s Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) program.

Gunner’s Mate 1st Class Chad Johnson has flown over 700 flags since the program began. He initially volunteered to raise the National Ensign and command flags throughout the deployment, but decided to take on the MWR flag program to help raise funds for his fellow Seabees.

Many participants chose the 4th of July to have their flag flown. It was Johnson’s busiest day; he raised over 150 flags.

Seabees have flags flown for many reasons. Some just want a souvenir home or to show their local pride by flying a state flag. Others have flown flags for veteran’s organizations and schools back home. The most interesting stories are those taken from Seabees who have flown flags in remembrance of loved ones.

“I flew a flag in honor of my Dad, Joseph Francis, who was a paratrooper with the 101st

Francis, who was a paratrooper with the 101st



GM1 Chad Johnson holds a state flag that is rarely seen flying anywhere in the Al Anbar province.

NMCB-25 Water Well Team Makes History in Iraq

Story: EO1 Robert Marshall

Photos: EO1 (SCW) Jason Hertling and EQCM Robert Marconi

On May 19, 2006, the water well team of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 25 departed from their base of operation to complete their first mission. The training the team received in Port Hueneme would finally be put to the test. The project destination site was a small outpost near the Syrian border. The team would concentrate its efforts on base improvements before actual drilling began.

CM1 (SCW) Wesley Florey and EO1 (SCW) Mark Hebenstreit led a team that ran and repaired over 600 meters of 2-inch pipe for a water main. The six-day project resulted in a water pipe that ran from outside the base perimeter and into the compound.

EO1 (SCW/SW) Sammie Gaillard, EO1 (SCW) Jason Hertling, and EO2 Adelberto Carrisquillo used heavy equipment to complete another project. Using a wheeled front-end loader and a track loader, they rebuilt over 800 meters of berms on the perimeter.

NMCB 25 crews also eliminated the problem of standing water on the Southeast corner of the compound. EO1 (SCW/SW) Gaillard removed a section of the perimeter berm and EO1 Robert Marshall, EO2 (SCW) Mike Nelson and EO3 Brian Brovold installed a drainage system. Water will now drain away from the compound through a system of gravel and six-inch drainpipes. The Seabees wanted to improve living conditions for the Marines so projects like these were important.

When the crew arrived, the shower facility was only operating at 30 percent efficiency. CM1 Kent Spencer, CM2 Kent McDougall, and CE2 Christopher Stevens overhauled the coalition forces' shower facility. The Seabees also repaired plumbing, installed showerheads and sinks, and repaired the air conditioning system. EO1 (SCW) William Kirsch and EQCM (SCW) Robert Marconi also repaired or serviced over 40 air conditioning units and several refrigeration units throughout the compound.

Seabees take special equipment with them on each project. With this gear, they are also able to accomplish other tasks. Crews spread nearly 500 cubic yards of gravel on the roadways throughout the compound and in walkways around the huts. Heavy equipment such as the front-end loader were essential, especially when dropping gravel over the barriers so that it could be spread by hand around the SWA huts.

SW1 Mark Thompson, EO3 Brian Brovold, EO1 (SCW) Jason Hertling, and EO3 Mike Brown were among others that helped spread the gravel. In addition to the front-end loader, the water well team also travels with a 2000-gallon water truck. Seabees operating this equipment were busy throughout the project. Because the site lacked running water, large holding tanks were necessary.



A drilling crew works into the early morning hours at an outpost in Iraq. Seabees used training they received at Port Hueneme, Calif. to successfully complete a water project in Western Iraq.

The Marines also had a building set aside for a potential laundry. CM1 Kent Spencer, CE2 Christopher Stevens and EO3 Mike Brown installed plumbing and electrical units there. Once the building was ready, the washing machines were installed, set up, and tested. The new facility now allows troops to thoroughly and efficiently clean their uniforms.

Many of the berthing units, known as Southwest Asia (SWA) huts, needed to be improved as well. SW1 (SCW) Jesse Vanloo and EO2 (SCW) Roderick Nelson went on a building spree with what lumber they could find. They built and installed shelves in several of the Marine Corps and Seabee SWA huts. The upgrading of hardware, including doorknobs and hinges, helped improve living conditions.

HM2 (SW/AW) Nate Humphery was also essential to the mission's success. He treated several of the Marines for cuts, intestinal tract problems, and foot trouble. His skill at providing aid to the Marines and several Iraqi soldiers improved mission readiness and boosted morale.

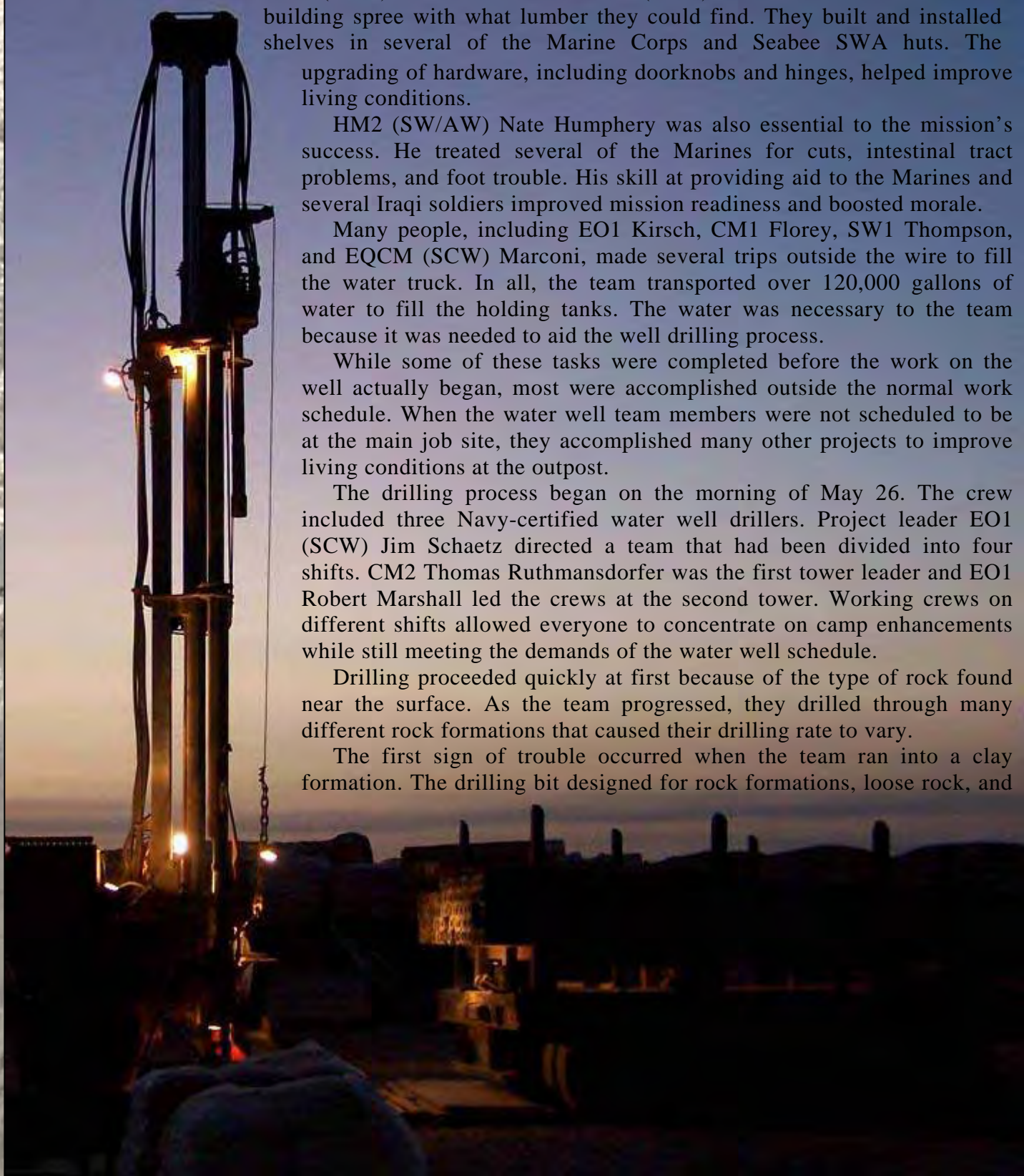
Many people, including EO1 Kirsch, CM1 Florey, SW1 Thompson, and EQCM (SCW) Marconi, made several trips outside the wire to fill the water truck. In all, the team transported over 120,000 gallons of water to fill the holding tanks. The water was necessary to the team because it was needed to aid the well drilling process.

While some of these tasks were completed before the work on the well actually began, most were accomplished outside the normal work schedule. When the water well team members were not scheduled to be at the main job site, they accomplished many other projects to improve living conditions at the outpost.

The drilling process began on the morning of May 26. The crew included three Navy-certified water well drillers. Project leader EO1 (SCW) Jim Schaetz directed a team that had been divided into four shifts. CM2 Thomas Ruthmansdorfer was the first tower leader and EO1 Robert Marshall led the crews at the second tower. Working crews on different shifts allowed everyone to concentrate on camp enhancements while still meeting the demands of the water well schedule.

Drilling proceeded quickly at first because of the type of rock found near the surface. As the team progressed, they drilled through many different rock formations that caused their drilling rate to vary.

The first sign of trouble occurred when the team ran into a clay formation. The drilling bit designed for rock formations, loose rock, and





Seabees prepare water well drilling operations at an outpost in Iraq. Seabees continue work on flight lines, bridges, roadways, along with convoy security and gravel hauling operations throughout Western Iraq.

process.

When a sufficient aquifer is reached, they started thinning the drilling fluid, known as drilling mud, to prepare for the next step in the well process. After determining what depth to place the screens, which allow the most ground water into the well tube, the casing and screens were set inside the drilled hole.

The casing is a six-inch, heavy duty, well-grade PVC. It is used as a collection point for the underground water. The casing was set and packing added.

At this point, the development stage starts. Water is forced through a jetting nozzle to clear any remaining drilling mud and mud residue from the hole. When the hole is sufficiently developed, the pump, motor, and draw pipe are then inserted down the casing. The team used a new flexible vinyl hose as the draw pipe to get the water from the bottom of the hole to the surface.

The electrical pump was wired up through the hole to a control panel at the surface. The stand for the panel and well casing were secured in place with concrete.



To “cement” the crews’ accomplishments for posterity, a metal ID tag with the battalions’ name on it was added to the concrete.

soil had to be changed. The crew refers to this process as a “trip out”, which requires removing all the drill string that has been placed in the hole so that a new bit can be installed. With the new clay cutting bit in place, the team “tripped in” and continued drilling through the clay.

Once the clay formation ended, the team had to “trip out” and replace the clay cutting bit with the rock-cutting bit and “trip in” again to continue the process.

The second obstacle occurred further down the hole and required much more work. The team became frustrated when the drill bit became stuck on a rock formation and would not move. Completely locked in, the bit would not move up, down, clockwise or counter-clockwise. After a lengthy process of trying to break free, the drillers managed to free their equipment and continue the



A Seabee stirs up clouds of dust as he moves dirt around an outpost in Western Iraq. Seabees helped coalition forces by using a front-end loader and track loader to rebuild over 800 meters of berms around the perimeter.

Pump tests measure how much water an aquifer will produce. The crew tested that rate during 16 hours of continuous pumping and found out that the aquifer yields more than an adequate supply of water. Members stationed at the outpost were happy the well was a success. Now they had an abundant water supply from inside the compound.

Every team member felt a sense of pride. They knew that they were the first Seabees, active or Reserve, to drill a water well in Iraq successfully. Coalition forces at the compound were amazed the Seabees could accomplish so much in so little time – and in the end, it made everyone’s life better.

N M C B 2 5 S p o n s o r s S e a b e e S w a r m 1 0 K R u n

Story: CSC Russell Reeves

Photos: EO2 Shayne Johnson



Soldiers, Marines, and Sailors begin the Seabee Swarm 10K at Al Asad with a starting temperature of 97 degrees. Over 90 personnel participated in the event.

The “Seabee Swarm 10K” run took place at Al Asad, Air Base in Iraq on Sunday 25 June 2006. There were 99 men and women from the Navy and Marine Corps and Army participated in the run with a brisk 97-degree starting temperature. The thermometer climbed steadily to almost 110 degrees by the time the final runner crossed the finish line.

For many of the participants this was the first time ever running in a race of this length but all of the pre-race jitters seemed to subside within moments of the starter’s whistle. The race began with a 1.5-kilometer hill rising to one of the highest points in Al Asad. The hill separated the avid racers from the rest of the pack before the course became much more friendly with rolling hills and lightly blowing winds encouraging the runners to continue on to the finish.

CPT Jesse Blanton, 82nd Medical, outdistanced the next runner by over four minutes as he finished the grueling 6.2-mile race in a time of 33:42. UT2 Hoiland (NMCB-25) was the first Seabee and second overall in a time of 39:47. The first woman to cross the finish line was Cpl Jamie Pflugfelder (MACG-38) at 47:41, followed closely by Sgt. Ann Mulrooney (S-224th). The first Navy woman to cross the finish line was HMC (select) Kimberly LaFray.

It took long hours of planning and gathering information to pull off an event of this size in a war zone, but it goes to show how far the coalition forces have come. Just a few months ago, an



BU1 Stephen Burmesch and BU1 Frederick Schrepfer race to the finish.



CPT Jesse Blanton, 82nd Medical, tries to beat the clock as he leads 2nd fastest runner by over four minutes during the 10K run. Blanton finished in 33:42. The first Navy woman to cross the finish line was HMC (Sel) Kimberly LaFray

event like this would have been considered far too dangerous to hold anywhere in Iraq.

Prizes were donated by AAFES in Al Asad, Iraq, Highland Park Christian Church and by Capital Drive Christian Church both of Des Moines, Iowa area. There were over 30 personnel from NMCB 25 and the 9th Naval Construction Regiment that help to make the even a success.



ENS Richard Hoeg



BUC (Sel) Grzebieniak, Chris



BUCS (SCW) Timothy Cooper



HMC (Sel) Kimberly LaFray



EOC (Sel) (SCW) Dan Hollenback



EO2 Juan Temiquel



LT Steven Sherman



EO1 (SCW) Steven Slaets



LT Cameron Roberson



CSC Russell Reeves



BU2 Jerry Macias



UT2 Shannon Hoiland

EMBARKATION DEPARTMENT

By LTJG Brian Alexander, CEC, USN

“It doesn’t matter how brilliant your vision and strategy are if you can’t get the soldiers, the weapons, the vehicles . . . to the right people, at the right place, at the right time.” – *Tom Peters, Fast Company, March 2001*

THE MISSION

Simply stated, the Embarkation Department (EMBARK) is responsible for coordinating Battalion movement. EMBARK’s job began shortly after your Seabee landed at LAX airport, where they were met by embarkation staff and put on a chartered bus to Port

Hueneme, CA. From there, EMBARK arranged flights for all of the Battalion personnel and cargo to Kuwait.

Now that we are in-theater, EMBARK is responsible for all of the Battalion's off-base transportation needs, whether on the ground or in the air. To keep projects supplied with the right Seabees, construction material, and equipment requires a phenomenal amount of coordination. The embarkation staff works with the Battalion's equipment company, convoy security teams, and Regimental material yard, as well as other Navy, Marine Corps, Army, and Air Force units to plan and execute transportation missions.



CM1 Boyd Johnson, CM1 (SCW) Jim Padilla, EOCS Tom Risley and CWO2 Jeffery Sekey (not pictured) make up the embark team.

THE TEAM

I was the Embarkation Officer for the first five months of 2006. CWO2 Jeffery Sekey has since assumed this duty. Besides an Embarkation Officer, only three Seabees accomplish all of this coordination - each carefully selected for their specific skills and experience. All three are either an Equipment Operator or Construction Mechanic, reflecting the importance of understanding the Battalion's transportation assets. EOCS Tom Risley is the Embarkation Chief. His 16 years of experience in an Air Cargo unit brings unparalleled knowledge of the air side of embarkation to the Battalion. On the ground side, CM1 Jim Padilla, the EMBARK Leading Petty Officer is responsible for coordinating convoys with other Battalion departments and other units. The rapport he has built with other units has been invaluable to the Battalion. CM1 Boyd Johnson assists the embarkation chief and the LPO. His computer skills are an asset and help him with his primary responsibility, which is tracking all the personnel data required for movement.

EMBARK – When your Seabee absolutely, positively needs to get there in a CH-53E Marine Corps Heavy Lift Helicopter.

Sign of the Times



EA1 (SCW) Gregory Kramer, SW1 (SCW/SW) Steven Panasuk, EA2 (SCW/FMF) Daniel Miracle, BU2 (SCW) Gerardo Macias, EA1 (SCW/FMF) Michael McCarty, and BU1 (SCW) Vincent Delsignore

Besides helping coalition forces with projects all over Western Iraq, Seabees have also been making improvements at the main base areas. Most of these efforts revolve around safety, security, and quality of life projects.

The command at NMCB 25 turned to the Engineering Aide shop when it needed a sign that would readily identify the Seabee compound for coalition forces and civilian contractors who arrive on a daily basis to conduct business. CE2 (SCW) Jason Baertsch, BU1 (SCW) Vincent Delsignore, EA1 (SCW) Gregory Kramer, and SW1 (SCW/SW) Steven Panasuk, created a new sign for NMCB 25, which is proudly displayed in front of the Al Asad Seabee compound.

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
COMMANDING OFFICER
NMCB 25
FPO AP 96601 – 5113

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

